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ARVEDE BARINE

A WOMAN CRITIC OF WOMEN*

BY FLORENCE LEFTWICH RAVENEL

MATTHEW ARNOLD'S crusade against the Philistines was of the nature of a holy war. His critics at home and abroad might not always penetrate the meaning and tendency of this new doctrine, but they felt intuitively that the ark of their covenant was threatened by a profane hand, and preachers and teachers were quick to sound the alarm. It is well, no doubt, that time should have assuaged so much of that old bitterness and spite; but for those of us to whom the word of the great schoolmaster is still law the silence that begins to fall around his name is of evil omen. Perhaps, indeed, it is his name only that we miss. It may be that those truths which came from him with almost the force of a revelation have become to-day a part of the common heritage of knowledge. His phrases, his very tricks of expression, still rise to our lips unbidden, like the words of Scripture. Are we not, with every intention of being original, thinking his thoughts after him in perfect good faith?

One service surely he rendered to us in America for which

* Arvède Barine is the pseudonym of Mme. Charles Vincens; born 1840; died 1908. M. and Mme. Vincens with their son moved from their home in La Rochelle to Paris about 1870. There Mme. Vincens, after a number of years of diligent study of foreign languages, both ancient and modern, entered upon her literary career, first as translator and later as critic and essayist. Her earlier work appeared in the *Revue Bleue* and the *Bibliothèque Universelle*. Many of her latter and better-known studies have been published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

The list of her principal works is as follows: *Portraits de Femmes; Princesses et Grandes Dames; Bourgeois et Gens de Peu; Poètes et Névrosés; Alfred de Musset; St. François d'Assise; La Jeunesse de la Grande Mademoiselle; Louis XIV. et la Grande Mademoiselle; Madame, Mère du Régent.*

we have not yet fully acknowledged our debt; with mild but steady insistence he urged us to look to France, as well as to Germany, for intellectual guidance. There was a time when we were rather disposed to be fascinated by the range and profundity of German learning. Our own scholarship was still very crude, and our educational reformers failed for a time to perceive how mechanical was our adaptation of German methods and what a *reductio ad absurdum* the system of so-called original research may become in unskilled hands. It was well, then, that we should turn our eyes to the land of Bossuet and of Molière, to the faults of whose chief spirits we of English race are little prone, while their intellectual virtues are for us the most needful and the hardest to win. "We count not ourselves to have attained, nor to be already perfect"; but if our minds are in some degree cleared of cant, if French thought and French speech have a growing importance in our discipline and our students flock each year in greater numbers to the schools of Paris, we may well see in the influence of Arnold one source of this salutary change. After all, to have saturated the choicest spirits of two generations with his theories and opinions is, perhaps, glory enough for any man.

If it seems overbold to invoke so great a name in introducing a French critic almost unknown in America, my excuse must be the practice of Matthew Arnold himself; with his love of the French genius, his almost covetous admiration of their intellectual sincerity and lucidity, of the keen and fearless vision of their representative thinkers. This French woman who has attained an European point of view more completely than any—I had almost said Frenchman—since the days of Mme. de Staël; this Protestant speaking with judicial calm to a Catholic world; this woman writing chiefly to and about women, and reiterating in many different tones the things women like least to hear and would be most grateful to be allowed to forget—it is not without reason one may claim for her some of those qualities which the great critic most esteemed in her people, combined with others rare in any age or country.

Arvède Barine is a moralist, an interpreter, a painter of portraits in words. Like Sainte-Beuve, she is interested in a man's works chiefly because they are among the paths by which she can reach his soul. The conditions and circum-

stances that have molded him—the heredity which, more or less obscurely, has modified his genius, the moral crises that have at once revealed and determined his character—these are to her supremely worth while. Behind the artist, the soldier, the saint, the coquette, she is seeking the man or woman, and the vividness of the life which she evokes from faded canvas and yellowing parchment is as unexpected as it is delightful.

For the gift of life is supposed to be the final test by which we know the higher or creative forms of art. We are sure that the great heroines of fiction are of our race and kindred, though of larger growth. Tess Durbeyfield, Sandra Belloni, come to us from their makers' hands throbbing with intensest life, and for the moment at least we are swept away into the stronger, fuller current of their being. But it seems otherwise with men and women who have actually lived and the dates of whose births and deaths are authentically chronicled. After so many years and so many volumes, how is it possible for us still to follow with a passion of pity and suspense the inner history of Jane Welsh Carlyle? Or that the lonely years and uncomforted death-bed of Goethe's mother should so clutch at our heart-strings? Or that against the background of our comfortable mediocrity Teresa de Ahumada should suddenly stand forth a heroine to be likened only to Juliet or Desdemona, to be wept over and worshiped with a passion that defies the centuries? These things imply surely no ordinary imaginative gifts in an author, and set her quite apart from the conventional writers of memoirs and monographs.

And it is not individuals only that her pen calls back to life. There is a little essay of hers on one of the old Spanish Rogue Romances, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, which to my mind conveys more of the atmosphere of Spain in the sixteenth century than many volumes of history or research. There is another on the memoirs of a certain transplanted Arabian princess which transports us, our western and Christian nerves aquiver, to the heart of an African harem, so that for a season we live the life of its inmates and share with a painful realism their sensations and impressions. That, too, is a memorable picture of the Swedish Court, in the time of Gustavus Adolphus, where the little Christina was brought up.

The ignorance and credulous pedantry of both rulers and

people might almost dispose us to indulgence in passing judgment on Christina's sinister career. By a curious paradox

"this nation of illiterates was consumed with a faith never equaled even in our day in the supernatural powers and virtues of education. For ten long years Sweden fairly held its breath as it watched each stage of its sovereign's progress in Latin composition and mathematics. The Queen was beginning Greek; oh, what tidings of great joy! She was reading Thucydides; the country was spellbound; and when foreigners began to speak of the child as an infant prodigy it was esteemed cause for national thanksgiving."

It was this admiring, trusting, loving people that Christina so shamelessly abandoned and betrayed! History shows few darker pages than that on which is written the story of Christina of Sweden. Even after two hundred years her image inspires a sort of physical loathing which many greater sinners do not provoke. The ideal of the nation which would have in her both a king and a queen warped her nature past all straightening and fostered ambitions and cravings as vicious and abnormal as they were impossible of accomplishment. And now

"neither her talents nor her superior intelligence, her learning nor her courage, can save her from a terrible verdict. She is outside the pale of humanity, being neither sane nor responsible. Her misshapen body contained a perverted soul, not discerning good and evil. The brilliant Christina, who was almost a genius, was also a moral monster."

Mme. Barine has given us a series of studies, varying in scope and importance, which deal with certain heroines of the reign of Louis XIV. The story of the young adventuress Maria Mancini, niece of Cardinal Mazarin, is not only an enthralling tale of intrigue and pseudo-romance, it is also a vignette of the French Court during the early years of the great reign. Those were the days before the young king had found himself; while he was yet gathering those impressions and convictions which were to determine his policy and the fate of France. His passion for this brilliant, degenerate, strangely seductive young Italian was a flame that set fire, not only to his heart, but to his intelligence and his ambition. "She made him ashamed of the creature that he was—without ambition, without aspirations either good or evil; with desires that took no higher flight than the choice of a costume or of a *pas de ballet*." She made him mindful, in short, that he was a king and

that it was in his power to become a great king. This was a lesson he never forgot and which continued to bear fruit, we may add, long after the Mancini, foiled of her hopes, had transferred her fascinations to other fields. She sowed the seeds of that incredible self-confidence which was to become the religion of Louis XIV. and to animate him in his long and finally relentless struggle with the old nobility of France.

All the phases and vicissitudes of the long struggle are unrolled in the two volumes which Arvède Barine devotes to Mlle. de Montpensier. The frank, arrogant, dashing, yet essentially vain and childish character of La Grande Mademoiselle is an excellent type of the gallant old order to which she belonged, while the systematic degradation and abasement which that order suffered at the hands of the king are well illustrated in her history. Poor Mademoiselle! The success of the system was less complete with her than with most of the others. To the very end she was a poor courtier and a singularly exposed and defenseless woman.

The volume entitled *Portraits de Femmes*, consisting of essays written and published at different times, contains, in my judgment, Mme. Barine's choicest work as an essayist, her most penetrating criticism of life. She is a woman with a woman's delicate intuitions, a woman's power of sympathetic understanding; and yet her ready sympathies are controlled by a trained analytical judgment and by the most upright and the most uncompromising moral sense. Here there is no splendor of royal robes to dazzle our eyes, no etiquette of court or castle to divide and weaken the human interest; we are brought face to face, in the close contact of daily living, with several of the most eminent and distinguished women of modern times, and through these pages they live and move in all the changefulness and complexity of nature itself. The mist of legend, the cant of conventional biography, are swept aside; a hand as unsparing as the surgeon's, though with the artist's formative touch, lays bare the secret springs from which flow all the main currents of their life and action.

The impression which remains with us after reading these records is one of sadness—sadness that is not accidental and transitory, but inherent in the very nature of things. Perhaps, indeed, any human document, in proportion as it is true and vivid, must make somewhat melancholy reading.

Perhaps we have the right to demand only that the tragedy be not unrelieved, that a streak of misty sunshine fall sometimes aslant from the stormy sky. At least we would be assured that the storm and stress of the conflict, the burden and heat of the day's toil, were not borne in vain; for if those who stand in the forefront of the battle have no word of cheer or encouragement, what hope can there be for us of the rank and file?

And it is precisely because of her buoyancy, her unconquerable spirit of faith, love, and joy, that the figure of St. Teresa and her story, however often we hear it, remain among the most inspiring, uplifting, and at the same time profoundly moving in all history. Hers was a life of incredible labors, difficulties, hardships, and austerity; but all along her way there sprang up the rare and perfect flower of heart's-ease. Indeed, it is the salt of her delicious humor, her unfailing good sense, native wit, and energetic cheerfulness which make her intelligible to us who are not saints and mystics and to whom her trances and ecstasies, visions and ravishments, are forever a sealed book in a language to which we have no key.

And her achievements—how far more marvelous are they than any miracle claimed for her by the Church! Not only did she reform her own order, but she set in motion forces which finally revolutionized conventual life throughout Catholic Christendom. Perhaps only one of Latin race could to-day look back with so much indulgence and sympathy and so little repugnance as Mme. Barine does upon the manners of Spain and Italy three centuries ago. Certainly only one who had come to know and love it well could evoke for us, in all its wildness and harshness, that Spain where Don Quixote was but an average citizen, where the fierce and violent scenes of Lope de Verga's plays could enact themselves unreprieved within the city walls, and even the convents were hotbeds of adventure and intrigue. This cruel, romantic, devout, bloodthirsty Spain, which was clamoring for bread at the very hour when all the riches of the western world were being emptied on her shores—this is, indeed, a background against which the form of Teresa de Ahumada stands out in bold relief. This was the stage for heroism and for madness, where the mere fact that a belief was absurd was no bar to accepting it, and that an action was impossible was no reason against attempting it.

This wonderful life had a fit setting. And out of it all, the ordeal of success so much more crucial than the ordeal of failure, she came unscathed.

"We see her grown old, exhausted, dying. What is left now of the fascinating Teresa de Ahumada? On the surface, nothing; only a little old woman with a wrinkled face, one arm useless, bent double with aches and pains, partially paralyzed, feverish, forlorn, piteous. Only her fine dark eyes still speak of her past triumphs. Looking deeper, there is everything; a creature intensely alive, lovable, exquisite; a heart of flame who would have been Dyonise, that Spanish Juliet, if she had not been a saint; . . . and she is a woman of genius withal, with serious and lofty ideas, and a bearing of incomparable dignity. The restless, capricious recluse of earlier years has become one of the great figures of the Catholic world. Taking her all in all, a being of rare perfection, saved from eccentricity, that snare of exceptional natures, by the most perfect good sense that ever dwelt in human brain."

"We may reject her opinions, smile at her candid faith and at her familiarities with the Almighty; we may even deprecate her influence over young and untried spirits. One thing is certain: we cannot live in intimate contact with this woman, even after three hundred years, without yielding to the power of that charm which subdued her contemporaries to her will and gave her the strength to remove mountains. And the secret of this spell is not far to seek. Saint Teresa was *alive* as no one is *alive* any more in our day, as few were, even in a time of abounding life like the sixteenth century."

"She never experienced that indifference which disintegrates. She could not endure melancholy, the inner root of weakness; she eschewed cowards and those whose only resource was tears. Courage was what she demanded of every man, and that he should not desert in the face of his destiny. She believed, willed, acted, and never did her heart prompt or her lips utter the questions, 'Is it worth while?' or 'What is the use?'"

But it was to her own order of Carmel that she bequeathed her most precious gift—an inspired legacy of faith, hope, and love stronger than death.

"Every evening, from ten to eleven o'clock, throughout the whole extent of the Christian world, the Carmelite nun is at prayer. Her prayer is not for herself any more than her smarting shoulders or the gnawing pangs of hunger that are always with her. The prioress has just been telling her, as she does each evening, that the Carmelite who is bent upon her own soul's salvation is a Carmelite unworthy of the name. She is there to pray, not for herself, but for others. She has heard, too, that this is the hour when the powers of evil are mustering in the world, and, since she entered the cloister, young and ignorant, these words awaken only vague images of mystery and terror. She prays, and in her waking dreams the great army of sin seems stealthily to invade the dark world. The throng grows greater; soon it will cover the earth. But no! right across the path of its advance there lies a group of prostrate forms. They are only poor, feeble women clothed in sackcloth, but before them

the dark army retreats for a moment, and here and there some soul is saved that would otherwise have been lost. The Carmelite bears with her to her cell the vision of her victory, and falls asleep in peace; and this splendid gleam of poetry she owes to St. Teresa, who believed that in the hope of expiating the sins of others was abundant recompense for any sacrifice."

It is indeed a far cry from St. Teresa to Jane Carlyle; and yet, far apart as they are in time, race, religion, and destiny, there is, perhaps, an inner kinship that goes deeper than all superficial divergence. At least we must admit that, among all Arvedè Barine's heroines, there are none for whom her touch is so tender and delicate, her tone so reverent, as for these two. Like St. Teresa, Jane Carlyle lived, toiled, suffered, and died for an ideal—for an object, from her point of view at least, supremely worthy. She looked at life with steady eyes, and her dislike of exaggeration and extravagance was quite as strong as that of her Spanish forerunner. If I did not fear to fall into the very extreme she so hated, I would affirm that the Holy Office even in Spain never devised (for saint or sinner) a martyrdom more exquisitely excruciating than the life of Jane Carlyle. Certainly St. Teresa's path was rose-strewn compared with that of this brilliant, gifted Scotchwoman, wife of one of the rarest spirits of the nineteenth century. Genius apart, the difference between these two women was chiefly a matter of religion. Teresa de Ahumada was upborne always by the sense of a divine strength reinforcing her own. Heavenly voices spoke to her in her visions, and she confidently looked forward to finding at the close of her long and toilsome journey a "rest that remaineth" in a "City that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God." For Jane Carlyle there was nothing of all this; she had pinned her faith, had centered all her hopes, aspirations, and affections, upon the most unstable of all God's creatures—a man of genius.

It would be useless to tell again to readers of English the story of the married life of the Carlyles, though to the eyes of a French woman some things are plain and obvious which have hitherto been doubted or denied. One fact is certainly established. Whatever may have been Jane Welsh's sentiments at the time of her marriage, Jane Carlyle was later on deeply, incurably, hopelessly in love with her strange, uncanny husband. No other motive, according

to Mme. Barine, would account for her voluntary self-immolation through so many dreary years. Of Carlyle, too, this French picture is enlightening. It is not drawn without sympathy and appreciation; on the contrary, no harsh feature is emphasized and all honor is done to his splendid gift, his noble ideals, his stainless integrity of heart and life; due weight is attached also to his own very sincere wretchedness; but, after all, the portrait is forbidding enough. "No tenderness," says a friend of Mrs. Carlyle, "no caresses nor affectionate words—nothing for the heart. A glacier on a mountain would have been about as human a companion." He might have taken as his motto the famous line of Terence slightly modified for his purpose: "I am a man, and all things human are foreign to me."

With her characteristic mingling of insight and sympathy, humor and severity, Arvède Barine does not fail to point the moral of the piteous tale.

"Great men are the most difficult to transform, precisely because they are made of a different clay, finer and less pliable than the common run of humanity. Therefore, with no intention of discouraging any woman who may aspire to marry a man of genius, it is perhaps expedient to explain to her that what these choice spirits have to offer in return for all they have a right to demand has no sort of connection with what is commonly meant by the word happiness. The satisfaction which a Mrs. Carlyle or a Lady Byron may expect is of a different nature—loftier, it may be, in the eyes of a few, less agreeable surely to the taste of the majority. The woman who makes choice of this lot should do so with eyes wide open, and provided always that her calling and election are perfectly sure."

Toward George Eliot, Arvède Barine takes a different tone. There is indeed a hint of dryness—I had almost said of grimness—in her treatment of our great novelist from beginning to end. George Eliot was a person who took herself and all that pertained to her with the utmost seriousness and reserved her humor strictly for the personages of her stories; and to the French mind, with its unfailing sense of measure and capacity for detachment and self-ridicule, the English woman's lack of simplicity and geniality is a serious blemish both in the woman and in the writer.

But Mary Ann Evans's relations with George Henry Lewes must be always the central fact in her otherwise colorless life, and her critic's treatment of her in this decisive episode must more or less determine his attitude

toward her as a woman and as a moralist before and after. And here, by a strange irony, the voice of her French critic rings out clear and true:

“She might have told herself that the happiness of the individual should be subordinated to the law upon which hangs the welfare of all, and that, as has been finely said, ‘It is unworthy of great spirits to spread abroad their own trouble and unrest’; but she never thought of this. Genius is selfish; it wills to live, and, finding itself cramped in the molds made by society for the mass of average men and women, it breaks its bonds.”

Judged by its immediate results, her course does not confirm the famous doctrine upon which her ethical system is based. More fortunate than her Tito or her Gwendolen, the consequences of her action did not pursue and drag her down. George Eliot won happiness with Lewes as she won glory, and, after a while, friendship, esteem, and popularity. What is still more remarkable from the point of view of the psychologist, “her character did not deteriorate—the usual result of wrong-doing and its surest punishment. Her soul gained steadily in purity and strength—a very strong proof (since the divine gift of remorse was denied her) that her conscience was really at peace.”

“But for her too must come the judgment. It flashed upon her sight when the hour of glory struck—a glory so undreamed of in 1857. ‘She thought she had counted the cost of her choice,’ says Lord Acton, ‘but she knew not what she had lost; what she really sacrificed was her right to freedom of speech, the first place among the women of her day, and a tomb in Westminster Abbey.’ ”

It is easy to see that Mme. Barine’s real sympathy and enthusiasm are reserved for Jane Carlyle, baking bread in the solitary night watches, and for St. Teresa, wielding her broom with passionate energy in the intervals of her conference with Popes and Archbishops and of her mystical trances and ecstasies. For these women did not shirk the pettiest detail of their woman’s lot; their most original and luminous ideas, their most ethereal visions, dawned upon them amid the dust and turmoil of strenuous daily living.

I said a little while ago that we need not expect to avoid the sadness inseparable from every sincere study of life; but may we not at least hope to extract from the history of these famous women an answer to our irrepressible

question: Was it worth while? The heroine of the essay which closes this series does not await our question. Her unhesitating, uncompromising "No" echoes through the pages of her story with a sad reiteration.

Sonia Kovalevsky was a young Russian woman of noble birth brought up rigidly under the old régime. After breaking lightly through the hedge of prejudice of her caste and her country, she won for herself, with the same ease and joyousness, a place in the foremost rank of contemporary scientists, made substantial additions to the discoveries of Lagrange and Euler, and filled for several years the chair of Mathematics at the University of Stockholm. Finally, however, this brilliant and successful scholar, still quite young, died of a malady so rare in our day as to be quite beyond the physician's power of diagnosis—a broken heart.

Mme. Barine has evoked for us all the elusive, baffling magic of this Slav nature, where heart and brain, reason and temperament, ambition and tenderness, are forever at war. Though we know the end from the beginning, still we follow with bated breath the slender, spirit-like form, with its shining eyes and child-like smile, through the years of her forlorn childhood shut up in a Russian nursery where the windows were never opened, past her agitated, adventurous youth, to the day of complete and glorious reward. We witness her splendid success in Paris, where the Bordin prize, offered by the Academy of Sciences for the most important contribution to an abstruse department of applied mathematics, was awarded to her by unanimous vote; and it is with an almost intolerable pang of pity and chagrin that we perceive how hollow is this triumph, how empty and desolate the heart which from our point of view should be bursting with pride and exultation.

And it is now, with this vivid and haunting picture still before our eyes, that Arvède Barine throws off the veil of parable and utters plainly her whole mind. It is here and now, at the opening of the new century, that, with a solemnity and an authority which become her well, this woman calls upon the women of her generation to pause a moment, as it were between two worlds, and take account once for all, without passion or prejudice, of this past which they are so eager to leave behind, this untried future upon which they are so anxious to set sail.

"Sonia Kovalevsky had dreamed the most extravagant dreams, and

behold! they all came true. She had broken with custom and prejudice and had set at naught the wishes of her family and friends, and, so far as men's eyes could see, no punishment had overtaken her sins. Her family had come to accept the situation, and public opinion had relented in the face of the integrity and the courage of the young outlaw. She had defied nature, which had made her a woman, while she had willed to accomplish a man's work in the world, and that indulgent mother had not taken vengeance on her mutinous child. What had she to regret? What more could she desire? Everything in life had gone her way. . . . Except two or three friends who held their peace, no one doubted that this woman was one of the great victors in the battle of life.

"Sonia Kovalevsky died young, after having exacted from her most confidential friend, the witness of her struggles, a promise to tell her story to the world. And lo! it appears that underneath all this glory and this admiration there were only ashes and tears, disappointment and despair. 'I have had,' said she, 'everything in life except the one thing needful.' This one thing needful which had been denied her was the life of the affections. Had she, indeed, mistaken her place ignorantly, and because it is our fate always to grope in the dark? Or had she not rather laid claim to a double portion at life's great banquet, and was this the mistake for which she was doomed to suffer even unto death?"

And Sonia Kovalevsky's case is typical, insists Mme. Barine. She is probably the most conspicuous and shining example of a woman whose brilliant and original gifts were developed by precisely the same training and discipline as if she had been a man, whose achievements received the same rewards and encouragements, only enhanced by her personal charm and the glamour of her sex. What voice shall reach us whose testimony convinces, if not hers?

"According to her own explanation...her unhappiness was the result of the dualism of her nature, which never allowed her to forget the discord between her feelings and her thoughts, between her longing to abandon herself completely to the object of her affection and the equally strong impulse to preserve her independence intact. It was the result of that eternal dualism which will inevitably arise in any woman gifted with creative powers, as soon as the passion of love awakens in her heart and asserts its power over her life."

"Sonia Kovalevsky's character was the consequence of her extraordinary intellect. Men of unusual gifts are almost always aggressive and absorbing. We are not to suppose that women will be otherwise if their cherished dream of intellectual equality comes to pass. The Christian theory of marriage had subordinated the individuality of the wife to that of the husband. The wife, under this régime, had the right to develop herself in such direction and to such a degree only as was consistent with the supremacy of the chief of the community. This was the price she paid for the protection assured her at the domestic hearth and for the heavy burdens she imposed. To-day this division appears to her unequal and unjust. Is she right or wrong? I cannot say; there

is so much to consider on both sides of the question. But let her rest assured of one thing: she must make her choice between the advantages, such as they are, of her present lot and those which await her if the new ideals prevail. Whether she admits it or not, she has a lurking hope that she may be able to hold fast what she has with one hand, while the other grasps the new treasures she covets; but this is an illusion. Men will never allow the tables to be turned upon them; they would be incapable of enduring a situation so anomalous."

This sad story is told with an intensity of restrained emotion, with a power of vision and realization, an exquisite delicacy and lightness of hand, which makes it a masterpiece of analysis and of interpretation, of creative criticism of the highest kind. And yet in the end Mme. Barine's conclusions leave us, to a certain degree, dissatisfied. For we may question—many of us will emphatically deny—the validity of her first assumption. We may suggest that Sonia Kovalevsky was a law unto herself, and not, in many important particulars, a type of womankind either great or small. We may question whether her capricious, ill-balanced, essentially unreasonable nature was really the result of her powerful intellect or only her inheritance from some remote Russian great-grandmother (such, indeed, is the tradition) who possessed these uncomfortable qualities unrelieved by genius. Genius is, by definition, exceptional, subject to no law of which we have knowledge. It is the wind of the spirit, blowing where it listeth and leaving no clue to the "whence" or the "whither." Many of the men and women of most powerful and original minds have either received from Heaven along with their other gifts, or won in the stern school of experience, the supreme power of ruling their own spirits. Poor Sonia, in spite of the abstract and impersonal subject of her studies, was perhaps but one more victim of the Romantic fallacy, and it is to be feared that for her happiness, under any conceivable conditions of actual life, would have been unattainable.

Arvède Barine began her literary career somewhat late. Had she written in her youth, would her theories and opinions, her attitude toward life, have been different? We have all been taught only too thoroughly that the kingdom of this world belongs to the young, and something, no doubt, this woman's work has lost in enthusiasm, in fire and faith, and intensity of conviction. But I doubt if any of those who knew her in life, or who have come to know her through her work, would subtract one day from those slow-moving

years which mellowed and ripened her spirit and made her at last a woman and a writer of such high and unique distinction. The good stars met in her horoscope and made her French woman and Huguenot. In her view of that world of Latin and Catholic civilization which she so loved her Protestant tradition supplies just that little gesture of detachment—that slight, half-rueful but sympathetic and indulgent smile—that is the surest antidote for hysteria or fanaticism. Standing, as she does, on the table-land of middle life, equally remote from the narrowness and immobility of age and from the blind passions and rash absolutism of youth, her message comes to us with a peculiar power and dignity and cannot lightly be set aside. She is of a race whose women have played always a rôle of importance; her studies, both broad and deep, have brought her into contact with the most interesting and representative personalities of modern Europe, and she has had for her living friends and counselors the foremost men of letters of her day.

If the translations which I have attempted are at all adequate, they may, perhaps, make it possible to appreciate in some measure the quality of Mme. Barine's style. But, as always, the individual flavor eludes the interpreter, be his hand never so cunning, his eye never so keen. On the one hand, her speech has the idiomatic simplicity, the familiarity and *homeliness*, the *goût du terroir*, which belongs to one whose roots have struck deep into her native soil; while, on the other hand, the perfect balance and rhythm of her period, the sober elegance and flexibility of her phrase, are her heritage from the tradition of the seventeenth century. She has much wit, but even more humor, and both her humor and pathos have their springs deep in her knowledge of the human heart; when for her, as for St. Teresa, our low horizon is lifted and a ray of the light that never was on sea or land streams across her page, then her dreams and her visions are clothed with a subdued richness of color and image, a delicate play of fancy, and a power of poetic suggestion which are of no age or country, but are the gift of the gods alone.

Arvède Barine's message to her generation has, it may be, a note of reaction; but she bows to the established fact. With that "sweet reasonableness" for which her people, if not her sex, has enjoyed so just a renown, she accepts the woman of the twentieth century as the logical outcome

of forces set in motion by the nineteenth, the eighteenth, even her beloved seventeenth century. She acquiesces if she does not applaud. Her knowledge of women rests upon solid foundations. She judges and appraises them with a justice and a gentleness, a profound insight and an inexhaustible compassion, to which I believe no man has ever attained. If she is a feminist at all, she is of the school to which M. Emile Faguet has recently proclaimed his adhesion—a feminist without illusions. When we read her calm and lucid presentation of the case we are forced to perceive that some problems, the solution of which we have been taking for granted, still await a final word. Nor can we entirely resist the suspicion that for the women of to-day—even for those whose feminism is most thorough-going—any immoderate elation of spirit, any parading with banners in the market-place, in anticipation of the glories of the new era, would be, like the crowing of the cock before midnight, distinctly premature, an error of taste as well as of judgment.

FLORENCE LEFTWICH RAVENEL.